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Booklover--Beckett

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Booklover — Beckett

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I was married in March. Every year around our anniversary, my husband and I take a trip. It is a relaxing trip of hiking, fishing, reading, writing, food, wine and possibly some sightseeing. This year was no different. I chose a few books to carry with me. One book comprised the three novels by **Samuel Beckett**: “*Molloy*,” “*Malone Dies*” and “*The Unnamable*.” It has been in my **Nobel Literature** collection for a while. I discovered it during one of my random visits to a used bookstore. This is one of my favorite things to do. I chose this book after hearing a story from a musician friend of mine that he had met a woman at a local music venue who was staying in Charleston while editing the **Beckett** letters. Seems she likes jazz and visits the venue on occasion. Locals believe that Charleston is just as much the birthplace of jazz as New Orleans. I will leave that debate to the locals. I enjoy listening no matter where it was born.

Samuel Beckett was awarded the **Nobel Prize in Literature** in 1969 for “for his writing, which — in new forms for the novel and drama — in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.” He is regarded as one of the most influential 20th-century authors. One description of his work details “a bleak, tragicomic outlook on human culture, often coupled with black comedy and gallows humour.” I had made quite a choice for light vacation reading.

Beckett was born in Ireland in April of 1906, but a falling out with his mother resulted in a permanent residency in Paris at the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He preferred “France at war to Ireland at peace,” a quote that I find reflected in the tone of his writing. Interestingly, “*Molloy*,” “*Malone Dies*” and “*The Unnamable*” were all written in French and then translated back to English by **Beckett**. “*Molloy*” was translated with the help of **Patrick Bowles**. **James Knowlson**, Emeritus Professor of French Studies at the **University of Reading** in London and the Founder of the **Beckett International Foundation**, penned the “sole” authorized biography of **Samuel Beckett**, “*Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*.” **Knowlson** states he wrote in French rather than his native English because he could easily write “without style.” What a curious comment for a **Nobel Laureate**.

“*Molloy*” opens with the simple sentence: “I am in my mother’s room.” Followed by the declaration, “It’s I who live there now.” Piecing together the influence of his mother, who was described as domineering, **James**

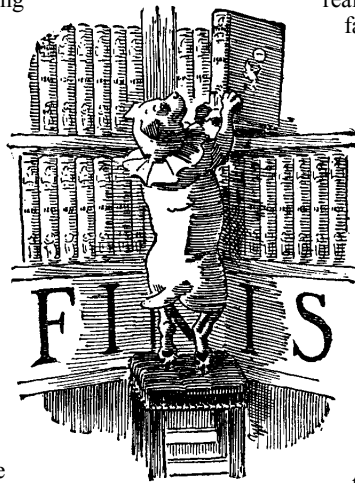
Joyce, who he met while attending **Trinity College** (1923-1927); and the revelation in his mother’s room during a brief stay in 1945 that he should move from **Joyce’s** shadow — these two opening lines speak volumes. **Knowlson’s** argument that “**Beckett** was rejecting the Joycean principle that knowing more was a way of creatively understanding the world and controlling it... In the future, his work would focus on poverty, failure, exile, and loss — as he put it, on man as a ‘non-knower’ and as a ‘non-can-er.’” The direction change, the acknowledgement of his own stupidity, and the awareness of his growing interest in ignorance and impotence are summed up: “I realized that **Joyce** had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.”

Pretty much sums up “*Molloy*.”

There are two main characters **Molloy** and **Moran**. We are introduced to **Molloy** first and then to **Moran** who is employed to find **Molloy**. I leave you first with **Molloy’s** thoughts and then **Moran’s**.

Molloy: “Yes, these imperatives were quite explicit and even detailed until, having set me in motion at last, they began to falter, then went silent, leaving me there like a fool who neither knows where he is going nor why he is going there. And they nearly all bore, as I may have said already, on the same painful and thorny question. ... Charming things, hypothetical imperatives. But if I had never succeeded in liquidating this matter of my mother, the fault must not be imputed solely to that voice which deserted me, prematurely.”

Moran: “It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. All is sleeping. Nevertheless I get up and go to my desk. I can’t sleep. My lamp sheds soft and steady light. I have trimmed it. It will last till morning. I hear the eagle-owl. What a terrible battle cry! Once I listened to it unmoved. My son is sleeping. Let him sleep. The night will come when he too, unable to sleep, will get up and go to his desk. I shall be forgotten. My report will be long. Perhaps I shall not finish it. My name is **Moran, Jacques**.”



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